

## ILINDEN THE UNDERLYING HISTORICAL AND ETHNOLOGICAL BACKGROUND\*

The Ilinden Uprising of July 20, 1903 (O.S.), often cited as the culminant “Macedonian” insurrection, was anything but an insurrection of “native” “Macedonians”, nor did it achieve its goal of proclaiming an independent Republic of Macedonia. This insurrection, in fact, was the work of I.M.R.O., a Bulgarian organization which, in its struggle for supremacy in Macedonia, eventually proclaimed as its goal (and *raison d'être*) the ostensible autonomy of that area as a first step towards its annexation by Bulgaria. In keeping with its treacherous aims, the epicentre of this uprising, described –and not only by Greek writers– as a “fraudulent insurrection”, was at Krushevo, that northern bastion of Hellenism (and the birthplace of my parents), which as a result was destroyed by both regular and irregular units of the Turkish army. This insurrection “just happened” to break out in other Greek centres as well, including Nymphaion, Klisura and Stromnitsa, and by August of that year had collapsed.

The so-called “Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization” (V.M.R.O. in its Bulgarian acronym and I.M.R.O. in other European languages, though more generally known by its popular designation of “Macedonian Committee”), which, as Skopjians never fail to point out, was founded in Thessaloniki towards the end of 1893 by the “native Macedonians” (as they called themselves) “for the purpose of freeing themselves from the Turkish yoke” and with the slogan “Macedonia for the Macedonians”, was, unfortunately for today’s “native Macedonians”, not founded by their (“native Macedonian”) ancestors but by Bulgarians (which these same ancestors evidently were, as will be shown later). This was the first Macedonia-oriented Bulgarian organization; and its goal was clearly stated: to proclaim the independence of Macedonia, according to the precedent set by Eastern Rumelia (which was declared an autonomous State by the Congress of Berlin in 1878) so as to pave the way for its subsequent annexation by Bulgaria, exactly as was the case with the autonomous State of Eastern Rumelia, which in 1885 was seized by the then Principality of Bulgaria and incorporated into its territory. This shows that in Bulgarian circles the so-called Centralists had prevailed over the Verhovists, for the rejected Verhovist opinion was that the

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stated goal should be the direct annexation of Macedonia by Bulgaria. In 1895 the Verhovists founded their own “Committee” in Sofia: since the goal of this organization was the immediate annexation of Macedonia, the direct result was the outbreak of civil war between the former and the latter groups. It is not surprising that the Verhovists should have reappeared in Sofia today, nor that they should have extended their activity into the Skopjian Republic, with a purpose very similar to that pursued formerly. In my opinion, the bulletin broadcast by Skopjian radio on February 3, 1993 leaves no room for doubt on this head. Here is the text of that item:

*The initiatives committee of the “Great Bulgarian” organization “V.M.R.O. - Union of Macedonian societies” intends to found a Bulgarian cultural and educational society in Skopje, reports “Tanjug” from Sofia. The principal purpose of this society will be –and we quote– “the unimpeded dissemination of literature and comprehensive information on Bulgaria and on the unity of the Macedonians, who have no hesitation in calling themselves Bulgarians”.*

This society will publish bulletins, and it also intends to open a reading room in the capital of the “Republic of Macedonia”. According to the Sofia daily *Trud*, the proponents of this scheme (whom it hails as “a small band of fearless Bulgarians”) declared that “They cannot prevent us from founding this society”.

I.M.R.O.’s goal, as set out above, as well as the capacity of those who inspired and founded it, was admitted many years later by the organization’s first president Hristo Tatarchev in the following statement:

*It was not possible for us to adopt the slogan of direct Bulgarian annexation of Macedonia, because we saw that that would encounter serious difficulties, owing to the reactions of the Great Powers and to the designs on Macedonia entertained by its small neighbouring states as well as by Turkey. We reasoned that an autonomous Macedonia would be easier to absorb into Bulgaria.* [Anonymous study entitled “*The Macedonian Issue*”, published by the Bulgarian Academy of Science’s Institute of History (November 1968) and translated by the Slavic Department of the Institute for Balkan Studies (I.B.S.), Thessaloniki May 1969, pp. 38].

This organization (I.M.R.O.) was late in coming to birth (it was not founded until late in 1893, although the Bulgarian Schism had taken place in 1872), because the watchword of Bulgarian policy at that time was “first an independent Church and then an independent Nation”.

In pursuit of this goal, as has already been noted, they proclaimed the slogan “Macedonia for the Macedonians”, for the significance of which I refer you to the Archives of the French Foreign Ministry [Ministère des Affaires

Étrangères. Documents diplomatiques. Affaires de Macédoine. 1902. Paris MDCCCCII No 23 (Sofia 13 août 1902)], where we find:

*The (Bulgarian) Committee has recently published a declaration, which has been distributed to all diplomatic bureaus and which contains an expose on the situation in Macedonia and the programme of reforms proposed by the Committee. This programme is expressed as “Macedonia for the Macedonians”. It is absolutely certain that what the Committee wants is for Macedonia to be given to the Bulgarian.*

Irrespective of these irrefutable official documents, conclusive proof can be adduced from the fact that when Bulgaria, which had launched this slogan via the aforementioned Committee, occupied Macedonian territory in 1916 and in 1941 (in the course of the First and Second World Wars respectively), it immediately proceeded to annex it to Bulgaria, forgetting its lofty propositions on Macedonian autonomy. In other words, it acted exactly as it had in 1885 in the case of Eastern Rumelia, just as I.M.R.O's first president, Hristo Tatarchev, had intended. Consequently, the description of the Uprising as an insurrection of “native Macedonians”, as it should be superfluous for me to note, is not found in any official (diplomatic or other) source, for the simple reason that at that time no one recognized the existence of “Macedonians” as a distinct ethnicity. All this, and especially in the sense prevalent in Skopje today, is nothing more than a favourite but frivolous attempt at a history lesson on the part of the Skopjian Republic, which has discovered half a century late that it can dispute the famous Ilinden Uprising with the Bulgarians on the completely unproven grounds that it was a “Macedonian” insurrection. The purpose of these claims is obvious. They are intended to provide –retrospectively– an historical foundation for the Republic of “Macedonia” first created by “Marshal” Tito in 1944. In view of this the Skopjian protest that “they claim that the term Macedonian Nation was invented by Tito, whereas we know that the term Macedonians was used by our ancestors, despite all the misleading propaganda they were bombarded with” is completely unfounded and thus –if not purposely misleading– meaningless. Because the “ancestors” on which the Skopjians base their conclusions never called themselves Macedonians, either before Ilinden (i.e. before 1903) or afterwards, because the Macedonian Struggle took place between Greeks (Makedonomachoi, or Macedonian warriors) and Bulgarians (Comitadji, i.e. members of the Committee mentioned earlier), and because nowhere (neither in international treaties nor in war correspondence or other writings nor in any other documents) is the term “Macedonian” found with the meaning assigned to it by the Skopjians today.

The purpose of the misleading propaganda referred to was exactly the

opposite: it was not intended to persuade them (the ancestors) that they should not consider themselves “Macedonians” but on the contrary to convince them that they were!

I would refer any who are desirous of learning more about this to my dissertation “The contribution of the Greeks of Pelagonia to the history of modern Greece” (Prologue by Stilpon Kyriakidis, Thessaloniki, I.B.S., 1959, p. 18 ff), where they will find a detailed description of the scenes that took place in the wholly Greek city of Krushevo during this rising, and full proof, in my view, of the Bulgarian origin and prosecution of this insurrection (this was in fact also confirmed by the meeting of the “Vlachs of Macedonia” which was held in May of 1992 in that same city of Krushevo, which is now in the State of Skopje).

It is clear, then, that the Skopjians, as is apparent from the arguments used, are applying themselves to the falsification of both Greek and Bulgarian history: Bulgarian, with regard to the origin and nature of the Ilinden Uprising, and Greek, with regard to the ethnic identity of the Macedonians, not only of those who took part in the Greek Revolution of 1821, but also of the Macedonians of the years 1871-1908 who, although for the most part Slav-speakers, like the famous chieftains Kotas, Gonos, Mitrousis, Kyrou, Dalipis, etc., were the cornerstones of the fighting wing of Macedonian Hellenism during the Macedonian Struggle.

This being the case, it can hardly be seriously contended that the Ilinden Uprising of 1903 led to the foundation of a “Macedonian State”, unless that phrase describes the ten day occupation of Krushevo by the Bulgarian comitadjis, the unfurling over that city of Bulgarian flags, the plundering of its Greek citizens, the proscription of the Greek tongue and the constant playing of the hymn “Macedonia Old Bulgaria” [For a brief account, see “The sack of Krushevo” (with an expose by the British Consul in Thessaloniki, Mr A. Billiotis, published in the Blue Book of the British Ministry of Foreign Affairs) in *Hellenismos*, 1907, p. 81 ff; and for more detail see my dissertation on “The contribution of the Greeks of Pelagonia to the history of modern Greece”, which was published in an expanded version, in German, by the Institute for Balkan Studies, Thessaloniki 1963]. In view of all this, there is no foundation whatsoever for views like those of Yannis Kordatos (the Marxist historian) on I.M.R.O. and its slogan “Macedonia for the Macedonians” as presented in *History of Modern Greece*, vol. V, Athens 1958, p. 42 ff.

Another Skopjian contention, and one on which they lay particular stress, is that “the Macedonian nation was divided into three parts, etc.”. This is clearly an attempt to press the clumsy Skopjian (scientific) argument that there is a distinct “Macedonian” people (or a distinct “Macedonian” ethnicity) which

has been divided amongst Greece, Bulgaria and Serbia, that these countries have thus not freed Macedonia but swallowed it, etc.

With your indulgence, I must say that I find it difficult to answer such clumsy fabrications. For this ingenuous contention simply abolishes the Macedonian Greeks, who from 1871 until 1908 pursued the Macedonian Struggle and who, by official Ottoman statistics, in 1905 numbered 678.910 souls in the vilayets of Thessaloniki and Monastir alone, as compared to 385.729 Bulgarians (nor do these statistics mention "Macedonians"). It also ignores the declaration of Lord Salisbury, the British Minister of Foreign Affairs, who on June 19, 1878 told the Congress of Berlin that "Macedonia and Thrace are just as Greek as Crete" (cf. Documents diplomatiques français, Affaires d'Orient. Congrès de Berlin 1878. Paris MDCCCLXXVIII. Prot. No 3, Séance du 19 Juin 1878, p. 85). It further ignores the March 11, 1912 treaty between Greece and Bulgaria, on the basis of which in the 1908 elections for the Ottoman parliament the Greeks had ten seats in Macedonia and the Bulgarians three. Nor does this treaty mention "Macedonians" (cf. Charles Velay, *L'irréditionisme hellénique*, Paris 1914, pp. 101-102). It ignores, too, the pamphlet which was circulated in Philippoupolis in 1885 to mark the thousandth anniversary of the death of Saint Methodios, which is mentioned by the French professor Victor Bérard [*La Turquie et l'Hellénisme contemporain*, Paris 1896 pp. 191-193] and which is an official declaration of the claims of the Bulgarian Exarchate: this pamphlet stated that "the Bulgaria of San Stefano could never have been abrogated if Macedonia as a whole had been imbued with the same national consciousness that pervades the Bulgarians of Bulgaria". There are no "Macedonians" in this declaration either. It also ignores the fact, reported by Professor Bérard (op.cit., p. 229), that between 1877 and 1887 the tremendous efforts put forth by the Greeks of Macedonia had tripled the number of schools (from 102 to 333) and more than tripled the number of pupils (from 4.639 to 18.451), so that by 1907, according to Michel Paillarès (*L'Imbroglie macédonien*, Paris 1907, pp. 420-421) 59.640 pupils were enrolled in 998 schools. It ignores, too, what Professor Bérard has to say about his journey through Macedonia in 1892 (op.cit., p. 125): he relates that in the district of Achrida he met a Bulgarian-speaker, who told him: "Our forefathers were Greeks, and none of them spoke Bulgarian". This district of Achrida, let it be noted, had been a bastion of Hellenism since the 12th century, according to Constantin Jireček, Minister of Education in the Bulgarian Principality (*Die Geschichte der Bulgaren*, Prag 1876, p. 211). And finally, let me return to Victor Bérard for one final point: Professor Bérard, who was anything but pro-Greek, writes that the Bulgarians themselves say that in 1867 Macedonia was entirely Greek (op.cit., p. 189).

All these Greeks [of my lengthy dissertation “The liberation of Thessaloniki as a symbol of national integration” (introduction by Styl. Kapsomenos), Thessaloniki, Aristotle University, 1968, which has also been printed in English (I.B.S., No 140, Thessaloniki 1973); cf. also my communication to the Sarajevo Conference, in *Balkan Studies* 17.2.1976, as well as my communication to the Athens Academy (1989) entitled “Refutation of the article on ‘Macedonia’ in the new Australian Encyclopaedia ‘Australian People’ in the Acts of the Athens Academy, vol. 64 (1989) 82 ff)], all these greeks then the authentically indigenous Greeks, were not liberated during the Balkan Wars (1912-1913) but constituted a segment of the “Macedonian” people, in the Skopjian sense of the term, which has been oppressed, which has been deprived of the right of freedom of association, which is the object of persecution, banishment, execution, humiliation, etc.

For the sake of discussion, let us accept that the old Bulgarians, those who in current Skopjian theory “considered” themselves Bulgarians and who, in fact, lived in Macedonia, as a minority community, however, as is apparent from the Ottoman statistics for 1905, have erroneously been taken as constituting a segment of the “Macedonian” nation. As we have said, however, these people were Bulgarians: they never (at that time) called themselves “Macedonians”; they fought as comitadjis in the ranks of the Bulgarian Committee; and later, in 1924, taking advantage of the Kafantaris-Molov agreement on the “voluntary exchange of populations”, they left for Bulgaria. None of them moved to what was then the district of Skopje –which, moreover, was at that time certainly not called “Macedonia”: it was merely “Vardarska Banovina” (Directorate of the Axios), an administrative district of the then Kingdom of Serbia. Serbia consequently delivered a protest to the Greek government for having exchanged these people for Greeks living in Bulgaria when, according to Serbia, they were in fact Serbs, (not, of course, “Macedonians”). All the “Bulgarophones”, as they were called at that time, who remained in Greece were old Patriarchists (adherents of the Ecumenical Patriarchate) from the time of the Bulgarian Schism, veterans of the Macedonian Struggle: “Grecomanics” (passionately Greek), in the words of the Bulgarians and their descendants. The following discussion on the nationality of these Bulgarian-speakers, which Michel Paillarès reports (op.cit., pp. 50-51) having had with Hilmi pasha, the Inspector General of the Macedonian vilayets of Monastir and Thessaloniki, is significant:

*Paillarès: But these Bulgarophones insist that they are really Greeks?*

*Hilmi: They say they are Greeks when no coercion, no constraint, is brought to bear on them.*

*Paillarès: And what is your opinion, Your Excellency?*

*Hilmi: My opinion, and the opinion of my government, is that they are Greeks. We classify our subjects according to which schools and which Church they attend. Being unable to win people by peaceful propaganda, the Comitadjis do not hesitate to make use of the most atrocious methods. They turn to the knife, the revolver, the axe.*

It is equally significant that much earlier, in 1871, the Russian Goloubinskii (see the relevant note in my dissertation on "The liberation of Thessaloniki", op.cit., pp. 25-26) had written:

*These purported Greeks nourished a more implacable hatred and a more intense scorn for all things Bulgarian or Slavic than did real Greeks.*

Just recently my attention was drawn to a passage in the magazine *Tachydromos*, an extract from a book by Giovanni Amadori-Virgili, a former Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs, entitled "La questione Rumeliota (Macedonia, Vecchia Serbia, Albania, Epiro) e la politica italiana", published in 1908 as number 1 in a series by the Biblioteca Italiana on foreign policy. The passage in question reads:

*Through their partiotic sentiments and their devotion to Greek traditions and Greek culture, the Slav-speaking Greeks of Macedonia express their vigorous determination to be Greeks.*

Legally, after the population exchange, the subject was closed, for those who remained were those who did not want to leave Greece, who did not choose to be Bulgarians. Nowhere is there any mention of the term "Macedonians". If today certain of their descendants have discovered that they are "Macedonians", that does not alter the situation, because it was to them, or at least to some of them, that the Skopje radio station addressed its March 5, 1990 broadcast, saying that "the most dangerous ones are those same hellenized Macedonians, the traitors, the anti-Macedonians" (here I would merely recall the slogan launched in 1895 by the Bulgarian Committee: "Death to the Grecophiles"). After all this, then, how many "authentic" indigenous "Macedonians" did Greece have, according to the Skopjians? And after all that, how is it possible to maintain that there was a single "Macedonian" people, which was dismembered and divided among Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria?

Let us take a closer look at what is currently being advanced on the subject of oppressed "Macedonians". The Skopjians tend to contradict themselves, now proclaiming the existence of 300.000 oppressed "Macedonians" in Greek Macedonia (this was the figure given by Simovski: cf. Peter Hill in the draft for the new Australian encyclopaedia and my communication to the Athens Academy, op.cit., p. 97), now 230.000 (Skopjians radio, 25 September 1991). In a recent statement to "Nova Makedonija" (29 July 1992), Kiro Hatzivasilief declared: "As to how many of this ethnic group ("Macedonians") there are living

in Greece, unfortunately no one has precise statistic data". And let us not overlook Mr Sidiropoulos (an ethnic "Macedonian" activist in Greek Macedonia), who affirmed on an Australian national television broadcast that the number of "Macedonians" in Greece amounted to no fewer than 1.000.000 (!).

Given that Greek Macedonia today has 2.200.000 inhabitants, even if we accepted the figures advanced by Skopje as valid, the population of Greek Macedonia would still be overwhelmingly Greek. It has been shown, however, that the "Macedonian" population described as having been dismembered in 1912-1913 was not in fact "Macedonian", but in its vast majority Greek then, and wholly Greek following the exchanges that took place, which have already been discussed. The numbers propounded by the Skopjians have no relation to reality; they have no basis in scientific or census data or in anything else; they are just meaningless numbers. In spite of this, however, the Skopjians continue to talk of a "Macedonian" people (dismembered, as we have already mentioned), both of the segment living in Greek Macedonia, which they call "Aegean Macedonia" (Egeiska Makedonija), and of that in Bulgaria, which they refer to as Pirinska Makedonija. It should be noted that, with respect to Bulgarian Macedonia, too, the Skopjians advance different numbers, now speaking of 178.862 oppressed "Macedonians", now of 230.000 (cf. Skopjian radio broadcasts on September 29, 1990 and September 25, 1991 respectively), but never mentioning the total population; and so here too their argument of a "Macedonian" nation divided into three cannot be taken seriously.

I am not, of course, referring to Skopjian Macedonia (the former Vardarska Makedonija) which, according to the official Skopjian census of April 1991 (the results of which were announced on Skopjian radio on December 2, 1991 and published in the German review *Die Welt* on February 28, 1992), out of a total population of 2.033.964, has 427.313 Albanians, 97.416 Turks, 55.575 Gypsies, 44.153 Serbs, etc., none of whom claim to be "Macedonian". (I also note that Mr Sali Berisha, President of the Republic of Albania, declared in a recent statement that the number of Albanians in the Republic of Skopje totalled 800.000). The census makes no mention of Greeks living in the Skopjian Republic; but in response to Greek Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Ms Virginia Tsouderou's statement that there are a number of Vlach-speaking Greeks in their country, the Skopjian government replied (indirectly, via Skopje radio, in a broadcast on November 25, 1991) that the "Association of Vlachs" of (Skopjian) "Macedonia" had declared in an official statement that the "Vlachs" of "Macedonia" (Skopjian "Macedonia"), and by extension the "Vlachs" of (Greek) Macedonia, were "Vlachs", not Greeks, and act as such. In his study of the activities of the (Greek) Bishopric of Pelagonia (Monastir) (Dejnosta na Pelagoniskata Mitropolija 1878-1912, Skopje 1968, pp. 35-43), Krste Bitoski, a



contemporary Skopjjan writer, says inter alia that:

*These Vlachs, most of whom were fanatical Grecophiles, gradually came to constitute the Bishopric of Pelagonia's principal allies in its struggle for the advancement of Greece's Great Idea. By the middle of the 19th century the churches and the schools in the city of Monastir were all in Greek hands.*

What has become of these "Grecophile-Vlachs"? While it is true that many of them settled in Thessaloniki, Florina, Athens, etc., where they maintain flourishing associations and where they occupy eminent positions in the Greek State and in Greek society in general, many of their relatives, often close relatives, have remained in their formerly flourishing "Greek Orthodox communities": Krushevo, Megarovo, Tirново, Gopesi, Milovista, Nizopolis etc.

And in answer to the question which arises with regard to the relatives living here of the "Macedonian political refugees", who (the refugees) were denied both repatriation and the right to visit Greece freely, the question "Why, since (the political refugees) are not considered Greeks, should their relatives in Greece be so considered?", I would return another question: "How can those designated in "Macedonia" as "Vlachs" and not "Greeks" not be real Greeks, when their relatives here (who fled to Greece) are not only Greeks but very prominent ones? And how can these "Vlachs" of "Macedonia" not be Greeks when, as is well known, they are the descendants of those "Hellenophile-Vlachs" described by Krste Bitoski? And how can the Vlachs living in Greece not be Greeks, of whom Victor Bérard, the former Professor of the Sorbonne whom I quoted earlier, wrote most truly in another work (*La Macédoine*, Paris 1897, pp. 329-240):

*The Vlachs have been .... signal benefactors of the Greek nation. Almost all Athens' monuments - the Academy, the Observatory, the Polytechnic School, etc. - are the work of Vlachs. Almost all the great donors, whose gifts and legacies have helped the Greek state and Greek communities, were of Vlach descent. Baron Sinas was a Vlach from Moschopolis; Doumpas was a Vlach from Nikolitsa; Tossitsas, Stournaras and Averof were all Vlachs from Metsovo. Without the Vlachs and their wealth Greece would have lost the cities of Western Macedonia well - Krushevo, Milovista, Monastir itself - for Greek claims here were pressed solely by the Vlachs.*

Again, in *La Turquie et L'Hellénisme Contemporain* (Paris 1896, p. 249), Professor Bérard writes:

*The Vlachs' sole ambition was to become day by day ever more Greek and to propagate the Greek faith. They became the greatest benefactors of the Greek people. They left the finest bequests, they raised the handsomest buildings for the people of Athens, they founded in Athens the finest charitable and educational institutions in the whole Greek world .*

And since there are some who affirm that the Vlach-speaking Greeks tend to be pro-Romanian or are of Romanian descent –another argument offered by the Skopjians to refute their Greek roots– let us see what Professor Bérard has to say (ref. as above) about the Vlach-speakers who settled in Romania itself:

*With respect to the Greek communities in Romania, in particular, and their great wealth, they are constituted solely by Greek Vlachs who, with one foot in Greece and the other among the Vlachs pour an endless stream of Romanian money into Athens, seemingly pumping wealth out of Romania's abundance in order to relieve Greece's poverty... It is Vlach money that pays for the Greek schools in Macedonia.*

I shall continue with testimony from an Italian source: Giovanni Amadori-Virgili, quoted earlier (op.cit., no. 13) writes without hesitation:

*From earliest times the Koutsovlachs have felt themselves to be Greek. Their sense of Greekness developed freely and spontaneously, the result of the habits of centuries. Just as in the past, from the Byzantine era to the Turkish period, the Vlachs of Pindus, Achrida and Thessaly had adopted all the characteristics of Greek culture, so now too they have embraced the Greek national consciousness, the final product of Greek civilization.*

Even Kordatos (op.cit., vol. I, Athens 1957, p. 38) accepts that the Vlachs of Thessaly considered themselves Greeks. But what need have we of other testimony, when the Romanian Inspector himself, Lazarescu Lecanda, writes in a memoire, at the request of the Romanian government (November 26, 1901):

*We have enough schools, teachers, professors and priests for the expansion of our national education: what we are lacking is a Romanian people...* For a more detailed development of this topic, see my study entitled “More about the Vlach-speakers”, in a volume dedicated to K. N. Triantaphyllos, Patras 1990, pp. 73 ff). Meanwhile, with your permission, I will close with one final observation: as the newspaper *Makedonia* reported on April 15, 1992, the international media have given great publicity to the discovery by Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Mrs Virginia Tsouderou that according to a secret census, later suppressed as unacceptable, 18,6% of the population of the Skopjian Republic declared themselves to be Greeks. In view of the official census cited earlier, this means that a total of 380.000 people in that state either are or proclaim themselves to be Greeks.

That is enough both about History and about the present situation!